Overview
This evaluation report is organized according to the originally stated project Goals and Objectives. Data sources for each objective are identified and summarized. Though the US partners are not obligated to gather data about the students from Bologna, at both DU and PSU data were gathered about these students in the interest of continuous improvement of the project. The findings related to the US students in Italy and the Italian students in the US are separated for clarity and purposes of drawing conclusions. At the end of each goal section, recommendations to the project team are made with regard to future actions and data collection related to that goal. At the end of the report, some broad recommendations are also included.

Because the number of participants is very small (2 PSU students in Italy and 4 Italian students in the US), these findings must be reviewed with care. With a project of this size, the first year of implementation is often viewed as a pilot where much is learned about the approaches which work best and those which may need modification. Narrative reviews and other qualitative data are the primary data sources, so no statistical summaries or comparisons were calculated.

Goal 1: Students will develop an understanding of at least 3 of the 5 thematic challenges confronting contemporary cities.

Objective 1A: Students will gain knowledge of the urban challenges facing the two cities in which they study.

Reflections from the two US students in Italy reveal little about this objective. While both students were enrolled in the Exploring Bologna course and appeared to value it very much, their comments were not explicitly directed to this objective related to their knowledge about the urban challenges. In fact, one student explicitly commented on the lack of alignment between the theme of the exchange and the course options available in Bologna:

The course options were quite limited and they didn’t all seem to be too related to the theme of the exchange (in fact the theme was little discussed aside from the Bologna course and professoressa Franci’s course). I would have liked there to have been a couple of required courses (aside from the Bologna survey) that dealt specifically with the theme of the [project].

Though it was part of the original evaluation plan, no narrative data related to these students’ academic work in Bologna were provided.

Based on narrative evaluation and course descriptions, it appears that the Italian students in the US did focus on gaining this knowledge. At PSU, students took courses (and succeeded with grades of B+ and above) titled Urban Geography, Urban Planning: Environmental Issues, and Global Inequalities and Health which contributed to their knowledge of urban challenges facing Portland. These students’ written assignments provide evidence of their knowledge gain. A course titled the Portland Seminar was developed expressly for this project by a faculty member in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning.
At DU, students took a course titled Leading Community Change in which they studied community, citizenship and spheres of influence found in the American and Italian urban contexts. The instructor commented favorably on the students’ fundamental knowledge of globalization which contributed to their ability to identify and analyze in a written paper the challenge of immigration which faces both Denver and Bologna. The Italian students attending DU also took courses titled Culture and The City and Social Inequality and completed an independent study which linked these two courses. The primary instructor for these experiences reported that “The Italian students especially appreciated the challenges of re-designing cities so as to deal with the problem of spatial (residential) segregation of ethnic groups. This appreciation was likely enhanced by the fact that European cities experience residential segregation in an especially profound way.”

Objective 1B: Students will identify and describe appropriate theories, methods and models for studying the urban challenges facing the two cities in which they study.

As with Objective 1A, reflections of the US students in Bologna do not address this objective. Based on the coursework in which they were involved, it is not clear that they would have had opportunities to study these theories, methods and models. Both students commented on the challenges of finding appropriate courses, even though an initial list was provided by the Bologna project team. Apparently this initial list was modified upon the students’ arrival and was quite limited. One student did comment, however, on urban theory as a strength of one of the courses he took in the Languages department.

Though it was part of the original evaluation plan, no narrative data related to these students’ academic work in Bologna were provided.

The Italian students in the US studied these theories, methods and models in the same courses referenced in Objective 1A. The students at PSU had a rare opportunity to engage in a small seminar designed just for this project which facilitated an in-depth exploration of the challenges facing this diverse urban city. According to one of their instructors, the students at DU demonstrated increasing ability to gather relevant information, analyze and synthesize it into a coherent application of theoretical foundations to real-life urban challenges. The other instructor noted that the students’ grasp of the historical and conceptual elements of the coursework was impressive and that the students were obviously completing the assigned readings and were well-prepared for class.

Summary and Recommendations related to Goal 1
It appears that the US students in Bologna were not provided with the opportunity to study the urban challenges facing that city – at least in a classroom environment. Surely their overall experiences living in the city did provide them with this knowledge, but it was not grounded in any theoretical or methodological foundation. While the Italian students’ experiences at PSU and DU were different, both appear very solid with regard to the thematic urban challenges identified for this project. If more students participate in the exchange in the coming year, it would be helpful to identify a consistent set of criteria which would be used to evaluate samples of student work produced in these courses and/or to produce the same type of narrative evaluations which were produced this year. Even though the types of work produced will be different, if criteria are established they can be applied by the faculty in order to gather data which would be useful for future project planning.
**Goal 2:** Students will develop an understanding of issues surrounding urban sustainability through community based learning.

**Objective 2A:** Through interdisciplinary perspectives and their practical experience, students will compare and evaluate proposed solutions to urban challenges.

Given the limited extent to which the urban challenges themes were addressed through the coursework and other planned experiences in Bologna, the data do not provide much indication of the PSU students’ achievement of this objective. It is possible that the Exploring Bologna course facilitated students’ ability to compare and evaluate proposed solutions to urban challenges but this can’t be determined since no data were provided. One student’s reflection included the following comment indicating a desire for more interdisciplinary perspectives: “The course was generally very good, however, I would have liked there to be more overlap in the theme from this course with the other coursework.”

The Italian students at PSU did not participate in a separate community based learning experience, per se. The course descriptions provided do not explicitly articulate a service-learning component, though there may in fact have been one. The coherence of these students’ coursework did, however, provide the interdisciplinary perspective which facilitated their ability to compare and evaluate proposed solutions to urban challenges. One student reflected on the knowledge she gained about the city of Portland and mentioned how she was “surprised to discover the number of similarities between the two Sister Cities.” She also mentioned that, in Portland, “urban planning is similar to European cities, in terms of transportation, smart growth and sustainability.”

Through their Leading Community Change course, the Italian students at DU joined a team which focused on Somali immigrant family needs and became a foundation for their internship at the Somali Community Center. The Italian students led the development of an afterschool tutorial program for Somali immigrant children. This experience bridged the community engagement and global citizenship literature they read in the course and their own experiences in Italy.

**Objective 2B:** Students will apply their knowledge of urban challenges to the lived experiences of community members with whom they interact as they evaluate the feasibility of possible solutions to those challenges.

The students from PSU who studied in Bologna did not have a structured community engagement experience in which to apply any knowledge they may have gained about urban challenges facing that city. In his reflection, one of the students said, “There was also a discussion about possible internships that sounded very appealing that unfortunately never materialized” indicating that this was at least one of the reasons he participated in this exchange.

Though the Italian students studying at PSU did not have a structured internship through project, one student completed an internship during Winter Term 2010 in the Office of International Affairs in the Portland Mayor’s Office. Her internship was co-sponsored by PSU and the Portland/Bologna Sister City Association. This student prepared a Bologna calendar of events and researched web links for inclusion on the OIA and PBSCA websites, applying her knowledge of urban challenges and contributing to the welfare of the citizens of Portland.
The Italian students at DU served as interns in the Somali Community Center where Center staff and community participants placed a high value on the students’ knowledge and service which addressed the educational needs to help advance the socioeconomic levels of immigrant children. Because of their own intercultural adjustment awareness, the Italian students were able to help the program director apply important socio-emotional solutions to the needs of young immigrant children in transition. Nearly 20 Somali immigrants attended the final presentation by the Italian students and their teammates. In their reflection, the Italian students said the internship “was the best experience ever. We have never done this kind of thing before, to tutor in the community. We were able to make a difference in the children and we love them now. We know that they will be better students because of what we helped set up for them. We will miss them. Many of them made pictures for us to take home and remember them. I hope I will be able to do this back in Bologna in some way.”

Summary and Recommendations related to Goal 2

Based on available data, there is no indication that the PSU students in Bologna were involved in explicitly coordinated community-based learning. It is likely that their day-to-day experiences exposed them to issues and challenges in the local communities but there was no intentionality or coordination of these experiences. Planning for year three should integrate specific experiences for domestic students studying in Bologna related to the lived experiences of local citizens. Even though community-based learning may not exist in Italy in the same manner it does in the US, faculty partners on the project team should develop relevant opportunities for students involved in this exchange.

Italian students in the US, on the other hand, received an inter- and multi-disciplinary perspective on urban challenges facing Denver and Portland, respectively. The students at PSU focused on these issues primarily through their coursework, while the students at DU did have a structured, community-based learning experience through the internship at the Somali Community Center. Continuing the structured approach to course selection at DU and PSU is advisable, with the addition of a community engagement experience at PSU. Perhaps the faculty at PSU and DU can conduct workshops or prepare documents to assist the Bologna faculty with developing relevant experiences for US students in Italy.

Goal 3: Students' non-native language skills will improve.

Objective 3A. Students will increase their ability to communicate in a non-native language, both orally and in writing.

The PSU students who studied abroad began the experience with quite different skills. One had completed 2nd year Italian and a semester abroad in Siena in 2008. This student scored at the A2 level on the Cultura Italiana exam prior to the Bologna experience and B1/B2 level upon return. The other was a native Spanish speaker with no Italian background. This student attempted the Cultura Italiana exam but scored a 0 on it prior to his study abroad experience, which included the CILTA language training course in which he scored A2, and scored at the A2 level on the Cultura Italiana exam upon his return. Clearly, both students' writing skills improved, but change in their oral communication skills in the non-native language is unclear since the test was not designed to measure oral proficiency. Student reflections indicate success in navigating the necessary activities of daily living in Italy, however, which is an informal indication of their oral proficiency.
While all of the Italian students studying in the US were required to achieve adequate TOEFL scores prior to their admission into the program, the faculty who worked with them were asked to provide narrative comments about their oral and written communication skills. One of the Italian students at PSU was a good written communicator but struggled initially with oral communication in English, but improved through his coursework and social interactions. The other student was highly fluent in both written and oral communication. At DU, the Italian students were also rated very highly by the faculty on their communication skills. One faculty member commented on the students’ ability to express complex problems and use analytical language. Another faculty member remarked that he often reads papers without looking at the name attached and was surprised to find he was reading an essay by one of the Italian students rather than an American student. In addition, the students at DU successfully used their oral communication skills to conduct stakeholder interviews at their internship site.

Summary and Recommendations related to Goal 2

Solid support is available for the US students’ Italian language development. The CILTA course is well-regarded and a very useful, intensive learning experience for these students if they need additional study. The Cultura Italiana pre/post test is well-designed but the scoring needs to be aligned more closely between the DU and PSU sites and plans are being made to do so. It would be useful to add an oral component to this exam in order to evaluate students’ ability in a formal way.

Even though the Italian students arrived in the US with fairly well-developed oral and written communication skills, it is generally advisable to facilitate their regular use of these skills in various environments. Social interchanges with both other international students and American students, discussions in their courses, and other informal interactions with faculty members will all contribute to the enhancement of these students’ abilities and confidence.

Additional Commentary and Recommendations

Though no explicit goals were articulated related to the students’ adjustment to their exchange environments, the student reflections and narrative comments provided by the faculty identified two issues which warrant attention. The US students in Bologna experienced challenges with securing housing and lacked an understanding of the coursework and credit system at the University. The Italian students in the US were unprepared for the US norms for class attendance, class participation and ongoing workload throughout the term.

In their reflections, the PSU students who studied in Bologna described a series of challenges related to locating and securing housing. The rental system in Bologna is different from the norms the students knew and, while the students were very self-sufficient in working through their challenges, it is unclear what type of advance information they had about the system differences. One of the students did comment that tackling this experience was one of the most important elements of the exchange. Nonetheless, future students should be fully informed about the housing policies and options so they can make informed choices.

In addition, the PSU students’ reflections indicated a lack of awareness of the Bologna coursework and credit process. The students described following a study plan and attending lectures then later registering for exams rather than courses, and experiencing overlapping class sessions. While both students attested to the personal growth resulting from these experiences and it is certainly possible that some reference to these differences were made in a pre-departure orientation, in their planning for the coming year both DU and PSU need to
ensure that students have information in writing about the housing and educational system differences.

Similarly, the Italian students at DU and PSU were exposed to a different educational system with which they were unfamiliar. In contrast to the Italian system, in US higher education students are generally required to attend all class sessions, participate in class discussions, and produce work products throughout the academic term rather than just complete an exam at the end. At PSU, the credit hour load was reduced to accommodate for these differences and facilitate student adjustment. While the students reported enjoying these interactions, this adjusted credit hour load should be retained for future students. The Italian students who studied at DU noted that “We are not used to students calling their professors by their first name.” They also said that the team work in some of their courses was new to them, but commented that, while these elements were new and different, they were not too difficult.

In order to draw conclusions about student achievement of the project goals and objectives, plans for more systematic data collection should be put in place. The student activity log was not completed by any of the students during the 09-10 year, but students should be asked to complete it next year in order to provide insight into their experiences. In addition, some type of data should be gathered through the project team in Bologna about student achievement of the project goals and objectives. Faculty in the US prepared short narratives about each student so this model could be replicated in Bologna.